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LIFE.STYLES IN RURAL AMERICA--THEIR CONSEQUENCES AND THEIR OUTLOOK.

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SIX BASIC CONCEPTS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO UNDERSTANDING LIFE STYLES. THEY ARE--(1) THE WIDE VARIATION AMONG THE MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY, READILY APPARENT BY VIEWING THE WIDE DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATION, SKILLS, VALUES, AND PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS OF THOSE MEMBERS, (2) CONSISTENCY WITHIN OUR SOCIETY, SUBSTANTIATED BY COMPARING BELIEFS AND ATTITUDINAL-BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE PATTERNS REGARDING A GENERAL REFERENT, SUCH AS CHURCHES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, (3) INDEPENDENCE OF REFERENTS, VALIDATED BY AN INVESTIGATION SHOWING THAT FOR THE MOST PART, ONE SECTOR OF LIFE IS NOT IMPINGED UPON BY ANOTHER SECTOR, (4) SOCIALIZATION, WHICH IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE PROCESSES WHICH OPERATE WITHIN THE CULTURE, THE SOCIETY, THE COMMUNITY, ORGANIZATIONS, AND REFERENCE GROUPS, (5) REFERENCE GROUPS AND REFERENCE PERSONS, AND (6) BELIEFS, ACTIONS, AND THE SELF, WHICH SUGGESTS THAT EDUCATION THROUGH PARTICIPATION MAY BE FAR MORE POWERFUL THAN EDUCATION THROUGH READING BOOKS OR LISTENING TO LECTURES. THE EMERGING STYLES OF LIFE ARE BEING SHAPED BY CHANGING VALUES AND MAY NOT FIND THE FAMILY AND THE CHURCH AS THEIR STRONGEST REFERENCE GROUPS. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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LIFE STYLES IN RURAL AMERICA - THEIR CONSEQUENCES AND THEIR OUTLOOK

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The topic which I have been assigned today is one of gigantic proportions. As I contemplate tackling it in a thirty minute period I feel much as a Chinese debater from Stanford University felt in my debating days when confronted in the rebuttal with all the issues which my colleague and I had presented opened with the statement: "I feel at this moment somewhat in the position of the Egyptian mummy pressed for time." How does one tackle a task of this proportion? A wise man once remarked: Don't try to eat an elephant all at once. Cut him up in steaks and roasts and before long he will be all eaten.

I would that today I could lay out for you the ten or twelve main life styles of rural America and could present to you hard data on their consequences and outlooks. Or, I would that I could single out and describe the main life styles which are just emerging which will be the life styles of tomorrow. If I could do that I would be writing the conclusion of a study I had already made rather than stating a problem which I hope to study. The fact is friends we do not at present have that kind of data. So I am going to talk to you in terms of data which we do have which bear on life styles in rural America and which will give you some hypothesis about consequences and outcomes. I should like to approach this huge task by discussing six concepts which I hope you will remember because as far as our data tell us about life styles today these six concepts are central in understanding them, what they are, what they will be and what their consequences and outcomes are likely to be. In a few years I may return again to fill in the chapter which we are unable to write today. May I say that the ideas I present today are based on several field studies which were done on both youth and adults in rural communities in the United States.

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Differentiation or Variation

Unlike the traditional homogeneous society in which the adults had the same basic knowledge, beliefs, skills, and attitudes, we live in a pluralistic society which is characterized by considerable variations on almost any characteristic you may choose to investigate. Members of our society vary greatly in their education, in their occupations, in their knowledge, in their skills, in their religious beliefs and participation, their political beliefs and participation, their civic and organizational beliefs and participation, in their health beliefs and health practices, in their family and kinship beliefs and patterns, in their dating beliefs and patterns, in their family support beliefs and patterns, in their recreational and leisure time beliefs and patterns, in their philosophical beliefs and patterns, and in goals and goal-oriented behavior and in their value standards and their value-oriented behavior.

Another important characteristic of our pluralistic society is that much of this variation can be found within the boundaries of a single community.

During the past few years, it has been my opportunity to observe and to study many aspects of these variations. Let me give the concept of variation some life with a few examples. Last summer, I visited Haight and Ashbury Streets in San Francisco where hippies congregate, sit in, live in, love in, smoke pot, trip with LSD, have a thing or two, search for meaning, and dress in a variety of bizzare ways, so long as they differ from the establishment, or in other words, the society which they have rejected.

For the most part, you and I are used to stable families where the husband and father supports the family and where the family meet together for at least one meal per day. There are many families in our society which are composed of just a mother and children. The husband, where there was a husband, has left the family to make its own way. Children drop in to pick up food when they are hungry and seldom or never do they sit down to eat a meal together as a family. In contrast with this pattern is the case of the husband who is carrying two or three jobs to support his family whom he sees very little because he is too busy supporting them.

Some families pray together, go to church together, and make religion a central focus in their lives. Many others never go to church, and while most claim some religious beliefs, they are often so lightly held that they play little part in their daily actions.

Some families protect their children in their friendships and dates. The avoidance of pre-marital sex relations is an important value standard. In other families, sex relations is an accepted part of almost any date and the pregnancy of an unmarried daughter is as natural as dandruff to be accepted with little concern by either the girl or her parents.

As we can sometimes see ourselves more easily in terms of contrasts, let me relate an instance of a conversation with one of my students from another culture and another society. I was trying to get him to make his local culture live in the opening chapters of his thesis. To communicate what I meant, I told him that I had observed him in Collegetown a few days before walking along holding hands with a girl. I asked him what would happen if he were to do that in his home village. He answered, "They would kill me." I said, "You don't mean it," and he said, "Yes, I do. Her brothers would seek me out and kill me and her father would probably poison the girl for in my village for this to happen the girl's family would be shamed in front of the entire village and they would kill me even though they would probably be sent to jail for a time for doing it."

Ask the young people in an American community to respond to five or six types of dishonest behavior and while most would agree they are all wrong, a sizable number would feel that none of them are "very serious," while a comparable number would feel that all of them were "very serious." Substantial numbers would fall in between, and would classify some "very serious" and others "not very serious."

Take almost any other variable you may wish to study, and you come up with much the same type of variation.

Consistency

The second key concept I should like to call to your attention is consistency.

Prior to World War II, most of the studies of individuals and families studied single indexes which they related to each other. This, I should like to call the "leaves" approach to the study of persons and families. In conjunction with the studies on morale and personal problems in World War II, Louis Guttman developed a technique for combining several attitude indexes with a test which determined the fact that they could legitimately be grouped together. The test was called the coefficient of reproducibility which was in reality

a test of response consistency. If the entire population being studied responded in a consistent ordered pattern with few errors, it was concluded that this consistency was sufficient evidence that the questions could be legitimately combined into a single index. Guttman was trying to present a better measure of a variable which he did, but in so doing, he also clearly demonstrated that people respond in a consistent pattern toward a referent. Thousands of Guttman scales have been used in many different societies and many cultures. The combining of several indexes together to form a single index, I should like to refer to as comparable to the study of a "branch" as contrasted to the study of the leaves.

A few years ago, we undertook a study to test the hypothesis that people's beliefs, sentiments, hypothetical actions and gross behavioral response to a referent would be consistent.

We studied this in relation to churches, civic clubs, fraternal clubs, and in relation to the community development program in India. Our findings in all cases support the hypothesis. People are consistent in their beliefs and in their attitudinal-behavioral response patterns regarding a general referent such as churches, civic clubs, and fraternal orders. From these findings, we demonstrate that there is both community consistency and individual consistency.

In contrast to the "leaves" and "branches" approach to the subject, I should like to characterize this as a more general level of study comparable to the study of the main limbs of the tree which branch off from the main trunk.

We have studied persons and families at the level of the leaves, the branches, and the limbs. The fact of response consistency makes it legitimate to do so.

Approaching the problem from other angles, Heider, Festinger, and Newcombe have each developed theories of consistency attesting to the importance of this concept in the behavioral sciences.

Based on the evidence from our researches, it is my opinion that persons have a strong need to feel that their beliefs, sentiments, and actions regarding any particular referent are consistent with each other, that perceived inconsistency within one's self is a highly unpleasant and usually temporary state of affairs. Our data tells us that at any given time most people will respond in a consistent pattern toward a particular referent.

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If we now put our first two concepts together, we conclude that persons differ a great deal but that each will perceive his reactions as being internally consistent.

The Independence of Referents

The third concept I should like to call to your attention today is the independence of a referent. Our investigations on the independence of referents as a part of one of our projects started in 1959 when Paul Heckert chose to test a hypothesis that religious participation and secular participation were basically different and should be studied separately. There were forty variables in the study which were related to either religious participation, secular participation, or both. Of these forty variables, thirty-six supported the hypothesis that these two were quite different and should be studied separately.

In the same study which we call "This is Your Life," because it dealt with several aspects of a person's life, it stood out very clearly that the parts which made up a particular sector of a person's life were highly inter-correlated with each other within the sector but that the different sectors of the person's life were characterized, for the most part, by little relationship to each other. In other words, a person's life does not fit together in a neat inter-connected, inter-correlated system. Persons whose lives represented one pattern in one sector might have a variety of patterns in any other sector of his life. For example, highly religious persons would exhibit a variety of leisure time patterns, a variety of secular participation patterns, a variety of neighboring patterns, and a variety of value standard patterns.

There are a few exceptions to this independence of sectors which we noted in our studies which are important to our interest in styles of life. We found that self confidence in performing leadership functions was related to civic participation, neighboring patterns, job relationships, and husband-wife relationships. We concluded that one factor could be an important component of the relevant cluster of factors in several different sectors of a person's life.

The second exception was related to the specific teachings or doctrines of particular reference groups. If, for example, a church taught and stressed for its members specifically particular doctrines regarding such things as: divorce, drinking, smoking, use or non-use of certain foods, or church attendance, that these specific teachings which sometimes fall in sectors other than the religious

sector showed up as correlated with church belief and with church participation. We concluded that specific teachings of a reference group will cross from one sector to another.

The evidence indicates for the most part that beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in one sector of life do not impinge heavily on the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in another sector, but there are some instances in which they do. It is our hypothesis in these cases that the actor will be consistent and will seek to avoid in one sector those things which will be inconsistent in the other sector. This fact of overlap limits his choice and his activity in one sector or in the other. He may behave in an inconsistent manner temporarily, but over a period of time he will gravitate to a pattern which he perceives as consistent. This consistency amid the sectors will be perceived most clearly in relation to strongly held beliefs, goals, or value standards.

Occupation, income and class also set some limitations. These exceptions build in certain linkages between the various sectors of a person's life and makes it possible for him to perceive himself as a consistent whole self.

The concept of independence of referents with some exceptions which provided for selected interrelatedness makes possible a rather wide variety of styles of life with each person or family perceiving his or its style of life as internally consistent or at least as not inconsistent.

From this conception, one might imagine an infinite variety of styles of life. This, however, is not the case as there are other factors which operate to limit the number of choices possible. This brings us to our fourth concept, namely, socialization.

Socialization

The processes which operate within the culture, the society, the community, within organizations, and within reference groups serve to limit and guide those choices which individuals and families make which in turn comprise their style of life.

Culture consists of the shared meanings and shared possible attitudinal-behavioral response patterns toward any and all referents in the stream of communication. There is the general culture which consists of the meanings and response patterns shared by the many nations within a culture, the national culture which adds national

traditions and patterns, and the community culture which brings individuals and organizations into focus as important referents. The culture sets the broad limits within which choices may be made.

A society which is an interacting group of people who share a common culture and a community which is a micro society present to their members possible meanings and possible response patterns toward a large number of referents. The society and the community present, however, not a single normative pattern for each referent, but rather a limited array of internally-consistent normative patterns for each referent.

Organizations and groups, unlike the society and the community, are special interest groups. They select certain meanings which are particularly related to their special interests. These become their beliefs; they designate the other alternative beliefs as "wrong" and these become their disbeliefs. They have goals which they promote and they create and maintain as value standards those things which they perceive as central to their existence and to the achievement of their central goals. Equally important, they avoid issues not related to their central concerns and they ignore value standards not central to their interests.

Reference groups and reference persons

Individuals and families have certain special interest groups or certain persons whom they look to for orientation and guidance. From the limited array of choices made available by the society and the community, the reference groups and reference persons attempt to guide those who look to them in choosing which of these alternatives to believe and which to disbelieve. A person or a family makes a very important choice when they select which reference groups and reference persons they will give greatest heed, for these reference groups and reference persons will, in turn, have a powerful influence in guiding their future choices.

Reference groups tend to limit the contacts of a person; they help him screen and interpret incoming data; they provide him with a ready-made rationale for their interests and a ready-made frame of reference in which to perceive their competitors of their perceived enemies. Furthermore, the total frame of reference will be internally consistent and will thus appear logical and the logic will make it appear to be right.

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In summary, the culture, society, and the community present their members with a limited array of internally-consistent beliefs and disbeliefs and a limited array of attitudinal-behavioral response patterns. Reference groups and reference persons guide those whom they are able to influence in their selection among those choices.

Beliefs, Actions, and the Self

Eighteen years ago, we started a research project on directive factors in social action. At that time, we assumed the prevailing position that it is attitudes that direct action. As the investigation proceeded, we found that the foundation of any social action seemed to be a relevant cluster of components and that these components come from ten types of beliefs and disbeliefs in the mind of an actor. These ten which we sub-divide into three sub-groupings of push, pull, and able are: pull factors: goals, belief orientations, value standards, and habit and custom; push factors: expectations, commitments, and force; and able factors: opportunity, ability, and support. We found that the three forms of attitudinal expressions -- opinions, sentiments, and hypothetical action -- were consistent with and similar to gross behavior. We thus call them attitudinal-behavioral response patterns. For convenience, I will call the elements of social action "beliefs" and the four forms of social expression "action."

We have already noted that a person's reference groups influence him greatly in the selection of his beliefs and also his actions. We have also noted that an actor's beliefs and disbeliefs will be consistent with his actions.

In general, in the past, we have explained this relationship in a one-way relationship, "as a man thinks, so he acts." On the basis of this assumption, most of our educational efforts have gone into inputs of facts designed to influence beliefs and hopefully to influence action. Our more recent findings and interpretations lead us in another direction. It suggests that "as a man does, so he believes," or in other words, that actions shape and direct beliefs. It would appear that action which involves a greater commitment of the self than thinking is even more powerful in shaping beliefs than beliefs are in shaping action.

What has all of this to do with styles of life? Well, just this: that life is action; it is participation; it is self-involvement. It suggests that as a person participates in a particular style of life that his beliefs and disbeliefs are powerfully molded and

shaped by the acts of living. It suggests that education through participation may be far more powerful than education through reading books or listening to lectures. We have always known that life was a school. We are only beginning to realize the potency of its educative processes.

In summary, as I see it, beliefs influence and shape actions, but actions in turn influence and shape beliefs, and the latter contains a greater involvement of the self and is thus the more powerful of the two. Usually, of course, they simply reinforce each other in the same direction and the interacting pair make a powerful combination.

Consequences and Outlook

When I was given this assignment, I was asked not only to look at life styles in rural America, but also to look at their consequences and their outlook. To do this, one must look at the past and the present to see the relevant trends and from these trends and cues to make some guesses or estimates about the future. You may not agree with the trends I select, the cues which I pick, or my guesses about the future. You may make your own, but the ones I give you should challenge your thinking and provide provocative questions for discussion.

Looking to the past, the main reference groups have been locally oriented. The family lived in a rural community; its occupation was farming or small business which involved the family in joint enterprises. The father was head of the family, and his word carried weight as he controlled the wealth and the resources of the family. The church and the school were community institutions working closely with families and supportive of them. There was little mobility. There was little schooling beyond the local community.

In our present modern industrial society the father and many mothers leave the home for work; the children go to a central school; and a larger town or city church draws the largest numbers. Many young people go away to college; family members leave the area even though older family members tend to remain. The father no longer has controlling economic power. The biggest problems seem to be world and national problems beyond the scope of the family and the local church. Through mass media, the outside world has moved into the locality and into the home. Power and influence have shifted from the older members of the society to the middle-aged and is shifting toward youth.

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Many youth have evidenced a restlessness and a lack of confidence in present society. Youth is on a search for new answers for new meanings and for a mission. Many do not trust their elders to provide them. They feel they must find them for themselves.

Some old patterns from other contexts have been borrowed from other cultures and represent newcomers in the American scene. The organization of activist groups on college campuses, a group identity for "hippies" with all its built-in supports for its members, and non-violent revolutionary tactics by which minorities may revolt against majorities with relative impurity. Peace Corps and Vista present opportunities for the search provided by the society. All should be viewed as attempts to solve a problem. Other approaches to solve the problem will no doubt be attempted and out of it some new vital enduring pattern may emerge. When existing institutions fail to meet vital needs, other new forms emerge to take their place. Progress is not always the result. In our day, the city, town and country cannot be separated from each other. What starts in one place soon finds its way throughout the entire system.

Can old institutions reconstruct themselves to meet the new challenges. One cannot predict, they will certainly try but old patterns are very difficult to change. Perhaps those who search for meanings may find that meanings derive from beliefs, not disbeliefs and that experience is always fragmentary and inconclusive except as pieced together and given meaning in terms of beliefs.

It would seem that some old established values no longer find the degree of support they once enjoyed. These values are being challenged and will continue to be challenged unless they find new champions. Values cannot long endure without strong support and sanction in some sector of the society.

Since beliefs tend to be shaped to fit behavior, one can predict that present trends will continue. The emerging styles of life may not find the family and the church as their strongest reference groups. While most of us would not choose it that way and would prefer to see a revitilization of the roles of the home and the church in American life, we cannot afford to remain blind to the challenge which present trends present.